

Orlando Sentinel

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TECHNOLOGY

Navy training-systems unit keeps cash flowing to area

Richard Burnett and Chris Cobbs
Sentinel Staff Writers

April 23, 2007

The Navy's training-systems agency in Orlando awarded nearly \$410 million, or more than half of its annual contracting budget, to its largest contractors last year, according to a recent naval report.

The agency's latest ranking of its top contractors demonstrated how it continues to spur Central Florida's high-tech military-training industry: At least six of the 10 leading companies have significant operations in the region, and nearly all have at least support offices.

Central Florida has the nation's largest cluster of military-training technology companies, thanks to locally based contracting operations for the Navy, Army and other military services. More than 150 operations employ more than 17,000 people locally, according to economic-development officials.

The Navy Air Warfare Training Systems Division has been the industry's lynchpin for decades. It has been located in Central Florida Research Park since the late 1980s, along with the Army's fast-growing training-simulation agency and smaller Marine and Air Force offices. Nearly 2,000 people are employed by the military agencies in the park's training-simulation complex.

The Navy agency's latest list of Top 10 contractors includes both defense giants and small businesses.

L-3 Link Simulation Group led the way, receiving almost \$90 million in deals involving training simulators and related engineering work, according to the naval report. It is the training-and-simulation division of New York-based L-3 Communications Inc. One of the company's largest naval training deals last year was a five-year, \$51.9 million contract to build tactical-operation flight simulators for F/A-18CD fighter jets, according to spokesman Rick Oyler.

L-3 Link's Orlando simulation unit provides simulator development and engineering support to several naval programs, including the F/A-18 trainers, he said. Forty engineers and other technical workers are

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employed by the local L-3 Link operation.

The Navy agency awarded a total of \$743 million in contracts last year, a 15 percent increase from the previous year, agency officials reported. It expects to award \$800 million in contracts this year.

Its cohort training agency in the research park -- the Army Program Executive Office for Simulation, Training & Instrumentation -- has grown faster than it has in recent years. The Army agency expects to award more than \$2 billion in contracts this year.

But the Navy agency remains a strong draw for companies in the region, company officials said.

"They've grown gradually for many years," said Ken Kelly, a consultant and chairman of the National Center for Simulation, a trade group at the research park. "They may not be seeing the exceptional growth here that the Army has seen, but they have good programs and are a strong, steady customer for industry."

No. 1 for opportunities

AT&T Inc. was recently ranked No. 1 among DiversityBusiness.com's 2006 top organizations for multicultural business opportunities. It was the seventh straight year AT&T has received the award. The former BellSouth Corp., acquired late last year by AT&T, placed fifth in the rankings, based on its incorporating of diverse businesses into its supply chain.

VZ Navigator in Spanish

Verizon Wireless now offers its VZ Navigator service in Spanish on Get It Now-enabled cell phones. The service features maps and audible turn-by-turn directions in Spanish to 14 million locations including restaurants, gas stations and banks. VZ Navigator costs \$9.99 for unlimited monthly use or \$2.99 for one-day use.

XOS developing archive

XOS Technologies Inc. said it is developing a searchable online archive of analytical coaching content, on-the-field video content and data resources for sports fans. XOS Studio, expected to debut later this year, will deliver statistics, alternate-angle replays and recruiting profiles for fans. Orlando-based XOS is a provider of content, commerce and services for sports organizations and fans.

New feature from Micro Key

Micro Key Software of Kissimmee, a provider of software for the security-alarm business, announced a new feature that enables alarm dealers, central-station clients and other end users to access, search and modify customer-account information on any Web-enabled computer.

Richard Burnett can be reached at rburnett@orlandosentinel.com or 407-420-5256. Chris Cobbs can be reached at ccobbs@orlandosentinel.com or 407-420-5447.

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